

Alternative Schools Task Force Meeting
9/27/05
Minutes

Present:

Alexanderia Honeycutt, Jessica Lewis, Jim Christman, Gay Nixon, Russell Moore, Donna Parker, Sid Spiva, Kathleen Benedict, Roger Robinson, Judy Wheeler, Kay Sapp, Melita Jordan-Thomas, Joris Ray, David Sevier, Art Fuller

At approximately 10:00 a.m. the meeting was called to order and the members of the task force introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their background as it relates to alternative education.

Jessica Lewis and Russell Moore from the Office of Education Accountability presented information from their April 2005 report "Tennessee's Alternative Schools" to the group. The OEA report focused on alternative schools for suspended and expelled students rather than other types of "alternative" learning environments that use atypical curricula, expanded hours, or other means to facilitate learning.

According to OEA staff the Civil Rights Project reveals that Tennessee has the 6th highest discipline referral rate in the U.S. and that this rate, in some part, leads to the number of Tennessee students enrolled in alternative schools. OEA staff went on to outline the recommendations from the report to the task force. Specifically, they noted that the State Board should consider 1) revising rules regarding the complaint process for alternative schools, and 2) expand the system of accountability for student outcomes.

A potential system of awards and incentives was introduced by OEA staff and discussed among task force members. It was noted that the system could be patterned after award programs currently in place in other state agencies.

The OEA presentation went on to note that currently 13% of alternative schools are partnerships between multiple LEAs and that 8% of programs are contracts with private providers.

The final aspect of the OEA presentation was an overview of the State Board's "Alternative School Program Standards"¹ OEA staff discussed these in terms of three broad areas 1) Curriculum and Instruction, Behavior, and Collaboration.

¹ <http://www.state.tn.us/sbe/alternativeschool.htm>

Next, SBE staff facilitated discussion of the “Alternative School Program Standards.” Each was discussed in detail and considered for inclusion as a minimum program expectation for alternative school programs statewide. The following table represents those standards deemed by the task force as an initial list of standards that warrant further consideration.

1.03	Provide community sponsored mentorship program
1.05	Develop a liaison with the school from which the student has been reassigned
1.06	Involve and inform parents about techniques and strategies to work effectively with their children, using school resources and home visits.
2.03	Engage in service learning
2.10	Learn self-assessment and improvement
2.12	Develop career awareness
3.02	Define clear, explicit student expectations and discipline plan
3.03	Provide consistent, firm, and fair behavior management
4.07	Include instruction through innovative, useable technology and appropriate software
5.05	Include career awareness and exploration
6.04	Include individual and group counseling components
6.05	Integrate conflict resolution into all aspects of the program
6.06	Include tutoring and mentoring components
7.01	Have a safe, clean and quiet facility
7.03	Have adequate space for low teacher-student ratio, 1:12 with teaching assistant
8.03	Include appropriately trained aides and counselors
9.01	Provide student orientation that consists of rapport building, assessment, goal setting, and development of individual student profile, designed to orient students to alternative school setting.
9.02	Develop specific, individualized long range plan for each student as the first and the last step of the transition process

Further task force discussion centered on the ideas of mandated intake meetings for new students and the importance of these sessions in the student transition process.

It was suggested that a representative be added to the task force that can speak to the challenges in small school districts that may have as few as 1 or 2 teachers and a wide grade range of students under their charge. SBE staff responded by stating that an appropriate spokesperson would be researched and invited to join the task force.

Other suggestions for future consideration were the that the perspective of “non-alternative” high school principals be considered, and that SBE

staff research alternative school programs in other states to broaden the task force's perspective.

Art Fuller from the SBE staff gave an overview of the BEP and how this relates to funding specific to alternative schools.

Gary Nixon, SBE executive director, addressed the group regarding the limitations and parameters of the task force. He asked the group to think about the "minimum standards" for alternative schools statewide.

The date for the next meeting was set for December 13, 2005 from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. CST in the SBE conference room.

Meeting adjourned.